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DAVID FRENDO

Introduction

Swept up in a military rebellion at Paris in February 360 and proclaimed *Augustus* by his troops,¹ Julian, who until then had held the subordinate position of *Caesar*, sought to gain official recognition for this *fait accompli* from the reigning emperor, his cousin Constantius. After protracted and predictably unsuccessful negotiations, however, Julian, following an audacious and carefully constructed plan, set off eastwards with his army in July 361 for the ensuing and by now inevitable confrontation. But then there occurred one of those events which not infrequently help shape the course of history and defy all but prophetic foresight. Constantius, on his way back from the Persian front and resolved at last to engage the forces of his rebellious cousin, died unexpectedly of natural causes at Mopsucrene in Cilicia on the 3rd of November at the age of forty-four.

Towards the end of the same month, news of this extraordinary turn of events (together perhaps with the report that Constantius had named Julian as his successor) was brought to Julian, who had been biding his time at the confines of Dacia, uncertain what to do next and fearful of the consequences of advancing any further. Emboldened by this bloodless victory and even more convinced that he was under the protection of the ancient gods,² Julian made his way swiftly to Constantinople, which he entered on the 11th of December in order to attend his cousin's funeral and to take up the reins of government. It was not long, in fact, before Julian ordered the reopening of the temples, the resumption of sacrificial worship,³ and the restoration of the cult of the ancient gods. This move was the prelude to a series of legislative enactments and administrative reforms all aimed at furthering the re-

alization of Julian's grand design to reverse the legacy of Constantine and replace Christianity by an intellectually aggressive form of philosophical paganism under the umbrella of which all the various traditional manifestations of polytheism, with their once widespread popular appeal, might be restored, protected, and reinvigorated. It was a vision which came into conflict with a rapidly unfolding contemporary reality, as is by now well known. But what must concern us chiefly here are those factors and paradigmatic historical events both ancient and recent which appeared, in the popular imagination and in the minds of many, to establish a linkage between exact religious observance and not only military success but also the prosperity and general well-being of the Roman state.

The Importance of the *pax deorum*

To secure what later came to be termed the *pax deorum*⁴ was the prime objective of a body of arcane and minutely prescriptive rules of conduct in the performance of sacrificial ritual and other aspects of the cult of Rome's ancient and, initially, indigenous deities. But the maintenance of this ideal state of affairs, in which the greatness and prosperity of Rome was guaranteed as the reward sent by the gods for Roman piety, was at best precarious. The gods could withdraw their favour and protection for a variety of reasons ranging from such morally neutral actions as a technical flaw in the performance of a sacrifice or failure to ascertain the will of heaven by the art of divination and take appropriate action to appease the anger of a particular deity (thus averting the evil consequences of a threatening omen) to

the breach of a treaty obligation and sworn oath in which the gods had been invoked as witnesses to punish whichever party should decide to break faith.⁵ The essentially mechanistic approach inherent in the implementation of this body of time-honoured religious ritual and prescription is well illustrated by the practice known as *instauratio* whereby, if even the tiniest slip of wording or enactment occurred in the public utterance of prayers, offering of sacrifice, or celebration of the festivals of the various gods (to each of which a fixed place in the calendar had been assigned from very early times), the whole process had to be repeated all over again. That such a minutely prescriptive and highly specialized approach to every aspect of public worship should at times lend itself to political manipulation by a ruling elite whose members filled the principle priestly colleges⁶ is perhaps not surprising. And no sphere of religious activity lent itself more to such manipulation than that of public divination. In the course of time, the use of divination for obstructive purposes (for example, to delay the start of a campaign, to stop a trial before the Assembly, to prevent a victorious commander from advancing further, to thwart a political opponent) became commonplace. Indeed, the scope of such obstruction was extended in the Late Republic so as to make possible the repeal of existing legislation on the grounds that it had been passed "contrary to the auspices."⁷

Finally, it should be stressed, by way of a conclusion to this brief attempt to sketch the nature of a phenomenon which was to become a constant in Roman history, that, as has rightly been pointed out, such politically motivated manipulation of religious belief "did not give the same offence to the Romans as it does to us, because religion, as has been seen, was concerned less with personal integrity than with public success. If the measures proposed and adopted worked, this was in itself the proof of religious efficacy."⁸

The Notion of the *pax deorum* under Threat?

Oddly enough it was this same utilitarianism, underpinning the complex of superstitious practices and religious beliefs that had given rise to the notion of the *pax deorum*, which eventually was destined through a series of remarkable con-

tingencies to supplant and destroy, together with their cult objects, cults, and places of worship, those same gods whose favour and protection had been so assiduously and so meticulously canvassed. But the explanation of how such a thing could come about is inseparable from the narrative of the rise of Constantine, starting from his proclamation as emperor by the army in Britain, after the death of his father, Constantius Chlorus, at York on the 25th of July 306 and culminating in his assumption of the position of sole ruler of the Roman Empire as a result of the defeat and deposition of his last remaining opponent, Licinius, in September 324. Only the barest outline of the most significant events will concern us here.

Before his victory in 312 at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, which ended in the defeat and death of his rival Maxentius, Constantine according to the version of events which he confided in his old age to the Christian bishop Eusebius of Caesarea⁹ had turned for additional supernatural assistance, on the advice of a vision which he had received, to the Supreme Deity of the Christians.¹⁰ In the following year, Constantine set about restoring their property to the churches of Africa, making generous contributions to them from the imperial treasury, and granting immunity from curial duties to the Christian clergy. The reason which the emperor gives (in a document addressed to the proconsul of Africa and preserved by Eusebius)¹¹ is, in the present context, especially significant. It runs roughly as follows:

In order that they [i.e. the Christian clergy] may not be distracted by some error or sacrilegious slip from the service which is owed to the Deity, but rather that they may serve their own law without any kind of disturbance. For when they perform the greatest worship to the Deity, they will, I think, bring incalculable benefits to the State.

Clearly, Constantine's initial patronage of the Christian religion was driven by his concern to ensure the continuing favour of the God/god of the Christians, already a small but fateful step away from the traditional forms of polytheism, even though it was expressed, instinctively and opportunistically, in the functional and utilitarian language of the *pax deorum*. An extant anonymous Latin panegyric of Constantine, probably to be dated to the autumn of 313,¹² throws an interesting sidelight on this insensibly altered and slightly ambiguous shift in Constantine's religious belief. Its unknown author, apparently

a Gallic orator and a pagan,¹³ both betrays and attempts to explain away, in the following terms, this barely discernible divergence between age-old beliefs and rituals and Constantine's recourse to a novel form of divine/Divine assistance:

Which god, which majestic being encouraged you with such favouring presence that, when practically all your associates and commanders were not just muttering in tacit disapproval but were openly voicing their fears, you should conclude, against the advice of men and against the warnings of the *haruspices*,¹⁴ that the time had come for you to take upon yourself the task of liberating the capital? Clearly, Constantine, you share some secret with that divine purpose which sees fit to reveal itself to you alone whilst delegating care for us to lesser deities.¹⁵

But at this point our anonymous panegyrist moves on, with the sleight of hand of a practised rhetorician, to consider, only to dismiss them, various fanciful explanations for Constantine's decision to march against Maxentius with only a fraction of his forces. At which point, the panegyrist returns to his original question, which he now addresses, rhetorically, to Constantine: "tell us, I beg of you, what save the presence of a deity did you have to advise you?"¹⁶ But then the orator proceeds to a provisional reply in the form of an alternative question: "or the calculation that led you on (for in the eyes of each one of us foresight is a god) was it that, in a contest between such very different antagonists, the better cause was bound to triumph and that, no matter how many troops he should throw in against you in his own defence, justice was, nevertheless, fighting on your behalf?"¹⁷

His final answer, however, skilfully evades the hardest part of his original question: "in the calculation of causes so diametrically opposed, you, Oh emperor, by the counsel of heaven, that is, by keeping your own counsel, counted not the numerical strength of the soldiers but the merits of the opposing parties."¹⁸ By expatiating on the reasons for acting "contrary to the advice of men" (contra *hominum consilia*) the orator has contrived to distract the attention of his audience from the need for any further mention of Constantine's disconcerting disregard for the "warnings of the *haruspices*" (contra *haruspicum monita*).¹⁹

But we must resume our narrative outline²⁰ and concern ourselves chiefly with the often unintended consequences of the struggle for su-

premacy that ensued, after the breakdown and temporary reinstatement of Diocletian's system of quadripartite rule or Tetrarchy, at that point where disagreement between the two senior emperors, Constantine and Licinius, over the future succession of their respective infant sons, led (in October 316) to war.

Although victorious in two major battles, Constantine was outmaneuvered when trying to finish off his opponent, which allowed Licinius to sue for peace. In the resultant settlement (1st of March 317) Licinius lost most of his territory in Europe and was obliged to transfer his capital and his court from Sirmium to Nicomedia, where he was to reside until an uneasy peace gave way to the final confrontation resulting in his defeat and death at the hands of Constantine in 324. Significantly, Licinius had turned during this seven-year interim to a policy of increasing intolerance and eventual persecution towards the Christians living in the territories under his control, thus making it easy for the victor's propaganda to paint a vivid and plausible picture of Constantine and his army marching under the protection of the *Labarum*, the imperial standard carrying the monogram of Christ, and of the forces of Licinius, as they joined battle, bearing the emblems of the pagan gods. It was an image which, by dint of repetition, must have left its mark on the minds of many.

In the next sixteen or so years, Constantine extended ever further his patronage of the Christian Church, of which he finally became a full member by receiving baptism towards the end of his life. He died of natural causes on the 22nd of May 337 before he could set out on his long-projected campaign against Persia.

Not long after the death of Constantine, the army in Constantinople mutinied and, disregarding the terms of the emperor's will, insisted that none but his sons should succeed him. What followed was a bloodbath in which most of Constantine's collateral relatives perished (including the future emperor Julian's father, his cousins, and his eldest brother together with many of their close associates). To what extent Constantine's second son, Constantius, can be held responsible for the planning and execution of this ruthless dynastic purge cannot be established with any degree of certainty. But the fact that he confiscated the victims' property points, at least, to a measure of guilt by association.²¹

The climate of insecurity and fear which followed the mutiny in the capital explains why

Constantine's three sons did not venture to declare themselves *Augusti* until the 9th of September 337, some three months after their father's death. Then, in 338, the three *Augusti* met at Viminacium on the Danube to determine by mutual agreement the precise extent and location of each one's sphere of influence. But in 340, Constantine II, the eldest of the three brothers, who, along with some imprecise and largely nominal right of precedence, had received the smallest share in this parcelling out of the Roman Empire, resorted to armed force and moved to invade Italy on the pretext that Constans, the youngest brother, had disregarded his authority. Whilst attempting to cross the Julian Alps, however, Constantine was ambushed and killed by forces loyal to Constans.

During the next ten years, increasingly repressive measures against the public worship of the ancient gods were sanctioned by the joint authority of the two remaining *Augusti*.²² But the steady undermining of ancient beliefs and practices was given additional force by a sudden turn of events. On the 18th of January 350, the usurper Flavius Magnentius, an army officer of barbarian origin, was proclaimed emperor and Constans, who had resorted to flight, was overtaken and murdered. In the next few months, Constantius II, now sole emperor, had to contend with two further usurpations: that of Vetranio, the *magister militum* in Illyricum, on the 1st of March and that of Julius Nepotianus, who succeeded in seizing Rome on the 3rd of June and proclaiming himself emperor. But, within a few weeks, Magnentius destroyed Nepotianus and on the 25th of December, Vetranio, who had been brought back with his troops to his former allegiance, was forced to abdicate, in return for which he was rewarded with a generous pension. Constantius was then free to prepare for war with his brother's murderer, Magnentius, who was, moreover, a pagan.²³

The decisive battle between the forces of Constantius and Magnentius was fought at Mursa in Pannonia Inferior on the 28th of September 351. Very heavy losses were sustained on both sides,²⁴ but Constantius gained the upper hand. Magnentius retreated via Italy into Gaul, suffering a final defeat there in the summer of 353. Magnentius committed suicide at Lyons in order to avoid falling into the hands of Constantius.

Hard on the heels of Magnentius' defeat and death, further anti-pagan legislation was introduced,²⁵ and in January 357 all forms of divina-

tion were forbidden on pain of decapitation,²⁶ thus throwing the full weight of imperial authority behind an attempt to obliterate those practices that go to the very heart of the notion of the *pax deorum*. It has been observed, correctly, that: "In fact the Roman system of divination, like all such deeply rooted institutions, seems to have contained a very effective inbuilt mechanism to shield it both from rational criticism and from refutation by events."²⁷ But no inbuilt mechanism can be proof against the slow erosion of popular belief which must inevitably accompany the reluctant observation, over a lengthy period of time, of unbroken success on the one hand and continual failure on the other.

Julian's Anti-Persian Rhetoric: A Disputed Inheritance?

Towards the end of 356,²⁸ Julian despatched from Gaul the text of a panegyric of Constantius, hoping thereby to retain the goodwill of the emperor and to counter any potentially dangerous hostile machinations on the part of Marcellus, the commander-in-chief of the armies in Gaul, whom Constantius had recently recalled. In this composition, Julian prefaces the enumeration of Constantius' military exploits with a curiously imprecise and elliptical thumbnail sketch of Persian history, in which he lays particular emphasis on the Macedonian conquest, the successful reassertion (by the Parthians, though that detail is not stated) of Persian control over a part of the original territory (held by the Achaemenids, though that detail too is left for the listener to supply), and, above all, on the annexation to the Roman Empire of the rest of that territory. This passage, which is indicative both of Julian's view of Roman expansion in the Near East and of his own determination to dominate, even in radically altered circumstances, the whole of that area,²⁹ is worth translating in full and subjecting to a somewhat different kind of analysis from any which it has so far received:

a) But now, I must address the subject of his actual exploits and leave for later the account of his personal qualities. Just when the Persians, in times long past, had gained possession of the whole of Asia, subdued much of Europe, and, I might almost say, encompassed the entire inhabited world in their expectations, they were deprived of their empire by the Macedonians and

became the prey or rather the plaything of Alexander's generalship. Chafing at their subject status, however, they rose up in revolt against his successors on learning of his death, and constituted once more a force capable of confronting the Macedonians. And ever since we gained possession of what remained of the empire of the Macedonians, they have impressed us as being formidable adversaries. What need is there to recall the actions of the distant past, of Antonius and Crassus, commanders invested with absolute power, and how at the cost of long-sustained dangers we shook off the stigma of disgrace as many prudent emperors made up for their blunders? What need to mention the next round of reverses and the achievements of Carus which succeeded them, when, after the disasters, he was appointed general? But after those who held sway before your father had imposed an admirable and welcome peace upon the enemy, did not the *Caesar*³⁰ engage in battle on his own initiative and sustain a shameful defeat? But when the ruler of the entire world attended [to the matter], brought all the forces of the empire to bear on that region and occupied the passes in advance with his armies and with levies of veterans and of new recruits, they [i.e. the Persians] were defeated and reluctantly embraced peace.³¹

The obvious purpose of the first part ("Just when the Persians . . . capable of confronting the Macedonians.") of this remarkably blinkered and ethnocentric survey of history, ancient and modern, in which, the Persians, after a perfunctory reference to their former greatness, are reduced to the status of rebellious subjects of the Macedonians, is to assert Rome's succession by right of conquest and inheritance to the empire of the Macedonians. On the other hand, the second part of Julian's exposition is entirely devoted to recalling, rhetorically, how the blunders of individual Roman commanders in the field were redeemed by the effective actions of wise emperors and whilst revealing an obsessive concern with the obligatory upholding of Roman invincibility, betrays a total lack of interest in the subject of Julian's long, disjointed, and syntactically overloaded first sentence,³² namely the Persians! But in a later panegyric of Constantius (probably to be dated to 357–358) Julian goes one step further and, by doing violence to what must have been the well-known facts of relatively recent history, sets out to deny the Persians any meaningful share in their own inheritance, thus combining the Roman talent for appropriation with the Roman art of dispossession. The passage in question belongs to a curiously slanted reworking of the account of the siege of Nisibis of 350 contained

in Julian's earlier panegyric of Constantius and may be translated as follows:

b) Whereupon he [i.e. Shapur II, referred to on the previous page of Bidez's text as "the king of the Parthians"] marshals his army in Persian fashion; for they preserve and imitate Persian customs to my mind because they do not think fit to be considered Parthians but make themselves out to be Persians. And so they delight in wearing Median apparel and they march in like manner into battle, glorying in weapons of like design and in garments adorned with gold and purple. In this way they contrive to give the impression of not having rebelled from the Macedonians and of recovering the empire which has belonged to them from ancient times.³³

In the first place, it should, I think, be noted that in seeking to perpetrate such a wilful distortion of the events of 226 as recorded by both Cassius Dio and Herodian,³⁴ Julian has been obliged to replace the word "Persians" (used throughout in the corresponding section of his earlier panegyric) with the word "Parthians," in order to avoid the sort of self-contradiction which even a relatively inattentive audience could hardly fail to notice!³⁵ But it ought, I think, equally to be noted that Julian's anti-historical antics must be motivated by the desire to refute some real current territorial claim on the part of his fancied would-be Persians.³⁶ And in fact Julian's contemporary and admirer, the historian Ammianus Marcellinus, records in his *Res Gestae*, written and published many years later,³⁷ what purports to be a Latin version of an exchange of letters between Shapur II and Constantius II, both of which merit translation in full at this point in the present discussion:

c) I Shapur, King of Kings, partner with the stars, brother of the Sun and Moon, send to my brother Constantius Caesar most cordial greetings. I rejoice and am glad at last that you have returned to the best course and have come to acknowledge the incorruptible verdict of justice through actual experience of the havoc caused on various occasions by persistent covetousness of what belongs to others. Since, therefore, a consideration of the truth ought to be free and unfettered and it is proper that persons of exalted rank should speak their mind, I shall state my purpose briefly, recalling that what I am about to say I have often repeated. That my ancestors held sway as far as the river Strymon and the boundaries of Macedonia your ancient records also bear witness; these lands it behoves me to demand, since (and may my assertion not be construed as arrogance) I surpass the kings of ancient times in the length and splendour of

my outstanding and heroic exploits. But on all occasions right reason is my chief concern. I have been wedded to it from my earliest youth and I have never undertaken to do anything that I have had cause to regret. Accordingly, it is my bounden duty to recover Armenia together with Mesopotamia, which carefully planned deception wrested from my grandfather. The view which you triumphantly uphold, granting universal approval to all success in war and making no distinction between virtue and deceit, will never gain acceptance among us. Finally, if you are disposed to comply with my efforts at persuading you to follow the right course, disregard a small portion of territory which has always brought grief and bloodshed in order that you may securely control the rest, wisely reflecting that on occasion practitioners of the art of healing also cauterize, lance, and even cut off parts of a body in order to make it possible to have all the remaining parts intact [there follows at this point a reference to the voluntary self-mutilation of certain unspecified wild animals in order to get rid of the body part for which they are being hunted, which I have omitted because it is something of a *topos* in classical literature and looks like the invention of Amiannus]. This I declare in no uncertain terms, that if this embassy of mine returns empty-handed, once the winter season of inactivity is over, I shall make all reasonable haste to come armed with my full strength and with fortune and the fairness of my terms as the basis of my hope for a successful outcome.³⁸

d) I Constantius, victorious on land and at sea, perpetual *Augustus*, send to my brother most cordial greetings. As one who intends (if you so wish it) to be your friend, I rejoice that you are safe and well but I strongly condemn your ever unabated and more widely ranging covetousness. You demand Mesopotamia as yours, as also Armenia and you try to persuade me to remove some members from an unimpaired body in order that its health may be placed henceforth on a firm basis, a suggestion to be invalidated, rather than consolidated by any kind of agreement.³⁹ Learn, therefore, the truth not obscured by illusory tricks and not to be intimidated by any empty threats. My praetorian prefect, thinking to undertake an enterprise conducive to the common good, held discussions with your general through the agency of certain base individuals, without consulting me, on the subject of peace. As for peace, we neither reject nor repudiate her: provided her presence is accompanied with dignity and honour and is not meant to derogate in any way from due respect to our majesty. For, at the present time when the course of events (may envy's breezes be appeased!) has in many ways shone brightly on us, when with the elimination of usurpers the entire Roman world obeys us, it would be absurd and foolish to surrender what we long preserved intact when we were confined within the narrow bounds of the East. Furthermore, let an end, I ask you, be put to the terror tactics which are habitually employed against us, since

there can be no doubt that it was through forbearance not faintheartedness that we have sometimes accepted battle rather than offered it and that when under attack, we defend our territory with the most valiant spirit of a clear conscience; for we know from experience and from reading that whilst in some battles and on rare occasions the Roman state has stumbled, in the final outcome of its wars it has never been worsted.⁴⁰

Both letters reflect recent events and contemporary reality but whereas Shapur's letter reiterates a territorial claim on historical grounds,⁴¹ Constantius' reply dismisses the claim as mere expansionism and, largely ignoring it, appeals to recent experience and to history ("from reading"/"legendo") as evidence of Roman invincibility. The arguments which Julian puts forward, on the other hand, in his capacity as panegyrist of Constantius offer valuable insights into the mentality and the motivation behind the future emperor, invader, and perhaps would-be conqueror of Persia.⁴² But the cavalier fashion in which Julian decided to fly in the face of the known facts of relatively recent history in order to support his arguments was more than just the isolated quirk of an obligatory panegyrist. The most astonishing thing of all, however, is to find Ammianus Marcellinus, in an ethnographic digression attached to his account of Julian's Persian Campaign, presenting a picture of the land and its inhabitants in which he appears to believe that the Arsacids are still sitting on the throne of Persia.⁴³ It is extremely difficult to account for this remarkable parade of ignorance on the part of the last great Roman historian. Indeed, it looks suspiciously like a desperate attempt to justify the bellicose propaganda of the apostate emperor or, to put it differently, the obstinate refusal of a moribund imperial power to acknowledge the reality of historical change. The fact that neither Latin nor Greek had any specific label with which to designate the new dynasty, such as had been the case with the Achaemenids and the Arsacids, might have appeared to make it easier to perpetrate the fraud. It can hardly be said to excuse it.

Julian at Antioch: His Programme of Religious Reversion and Military Aggression

In A.D. 361, at a relatively early point in his advance against Constantius, Julian sent an official

letter from his headquarters at Naissus to the senate in Rome, which Ammianus describes as acrimonious and abusive towards the emperor and containing detailed charges against his conduct and character. But the senate, we are told, showed both its independence of spirit and its loyalty towards Constantius by unanimously demanding that Julian should show some respect for the man to whom he owed his present position. Ammianus also informs us that Julian went on to attack the memory of Constantine on the grounds that he was a disturber of the ancient laws and of custom received in olden times and that he had been the first to advance barbarians to the honour of the consulship.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the letter itself has not come down to us but even the little that Ammianus tells us is an indication of just how early the propaganda campaign of Julian and his associates was beginning to take shape.

By December 361 Julian, having been appointed his successor by Constantius shortly before the latter's death on the 3rd of November, had, after what was virtually a bloodless victory, been handed the imperial throne by favour of the immortal gods, or so it must have seemed. Then, having used his newly acquired legislative and judicial powers to lay the foundations for the future realization of his grand design, Julian left Constantinople for Antioch (in May 362) to complete the preparations for his projected Persian campaign. There, the former student of philosophy, monkish recluse, and accidental leader of men was destined to have a bruising encounter with the life of a sophisticated ancient metropolis and its inhabitants not as he would have it but as it actually was. In fact it took only about three months, from his arrival in the Syrian capital in July for what had been initially friendly relations between the emperor and its citizens, to come under severe and almost intolerable strain. We learn, from the explicit testimony of one of his own writings (published only four months after the event)⁴⁵ how Julian had allowed himself to become embroiled in a squalid feud with the people of Antioch, who, unforgivably, had failed to live up to his preconceived notions of how they should be. The incident is revealing and his account of events is worth recording in translation:

On the tenth month as it is numbered with us⁴⁶ (I believe you call it *Lôos*) the traditional festival of this god [i.e. Apollo] is celebrated. And you should have been eagerly making your way to Daphne [suburb of

Antioch with a famous shrine of Apollo]. I, for my part, ran up to this place, thinking that here especially I would have the pleasure of witnessing your wealth and your munificence. Then I tried to envisage what the procession would be like, seeing as in a dream the sacrificial victims, the libations, the choruses in honour of the god, the clouds of incense, and over there around the shrine, the youth of the city, their souls arrayed in fitting reverence and they themselves apparelled in magnificent white garments. But, on entering the sacred enclosure, I found neither incense nor sacrificial cake, nor victim. There and then I was astonished and thought I was outside of the enclosure and that, out of respect for me in my capacity as sovereign pontiff, you were waiting for me to give the signal. But when I asked what the city was going to sacrifice in celebration of the god's annual festival, the priest said: "I have come from home with a goose as a sacrificial offering to the god, but this time the city has prepared nothing on its own account." Whereupon, with my fondness for antagonizing people, I addressed the senate in extremely unreasonable language, which perhaps it would not be out of place for me to remind you of on this occasion too.⁴⁷

Julian then proceeds, not without a certain relish, to quote his own speech.⁴⁸ Its prevailing tone is one of indignant reproach in which all the blame for what he regards as a deplorable state of affairs is attributed to the conversion to Christianity of the needy majority by the Christian wives of wealthy men, who take advantage of their uxorious husbands in order to give alms to the poor!⁴⁹ It is instructive to note here how Julian seeks to explain away the awkward reality of a two-to-three-centuries-old subterranean expansion of the Christian community at Antioch, which had been confirmed and consolidated by the seal of imperial approval and support over a period of nearly half a century under Constantine and his sons. It was a reality which Julian found so unpalatable that he refused to accord it any kind of verbal recognition: instead of referring to the Christians of Antioch by what had long been their usual name,⁵⁰ he insisted on calling them "the Galileans," in the apparent belief that a mere change of names could somehow effect the reduction to its original geographical insignificance and un-Hellenic roots of what had become the fastest growing and probably the most successfully organized religion of the Roman Empire. Four years earlier, he had similarly dismissed the territorial claims of a reinvigorated Persian Empire under the rule of a new Persian dynasty as "Parthians pretending to be Persians."

It is not surprising, therefore, that the emperor's initial literary response to this first confrontation with the Christians of Antioch should have been intended as an attack upon the first Christian emperor and his sons. But before that could happen, tempers were to be further frayed and attitudes increasingly hardened as the result of a disconcerting and unpleasant series of events.

Later on, in the course of that same month of October 362, after discovering that Apollo's oracle at Daphne had fallen silent, Julian set out to find an explanation for the oracle's apparent demise. He was informed that the sacred enclosure had been polluted by the presence of dead bodies.⁵¹ In fact, the remains of the Christian martyr St. Babylas had been buried in a church built in front of the temple of Apollo by the emperor's half-brother, Gallus. Julian immediately gave orders that the martyr's remains be removed from the spot and returned to their original resting place. But the Christians of Antioch who attended the removal retorted by celebrating the incident as a victory over idolatry and succeeded in goading the emperor to fury. He reacted with extreme and disproportionate severity. A point of no return had probably already been reached but worse was to come. On the 22nd of October the temple of Apollo unaccountably caught fire and both the roof and the cult statue of the god were destroyed. Julian, enraged beyond measure, ordered that an investigation be conducted with all the brutal licence of late antique justice. Although nothing concrete was ever proved against any named individual, Julian, and others no doubt, remained convinced that the Christians of Antioch were responsible for the fire.⁵² Only one thing is certain (at this remove in time, and perhaps even at the time of its occurrence, given the intensity of the passions which had been aroused on both sides): if the fire had in reality been accidental, very few people would have been prepared to believe it. At any rate, Julian retaliated by closing the Great Church at Antioch and confiscating its liturgical vessels. But soon his retaliation was to take a rather different form. It was probably during the festival of the Saturnalia (15–17 December 362) that Julian set about writing the work commonly known as the *Caesars*. The occasion for the dramatic setting for this bizarre work of fantasy satire is in fact the celebration of the Saturnalia, a festival traditionally associated with revelry and light-hearted banter. The

author of the *Caesars* introduces both his real self and his own composition by means of a dialogue with an unnamed friend in which he first figures as participant and then as narrator. His own nature, he tells his friend, has not equipped him to enter into the general mood of the festival but he will, in deference to the god whose feast it is, contribute a sort of Platonic myth combining truth with falsehood in a manner which the narrative itself will reveal. Julian's nameless interlocutor proclaims his eagerness to be enlightened and conveniently fades from the picture, leaving the emperor to extract the maximum advantage from the unlimited licence which he has contrived to grant himself. In the ensuing narrative, Romulus, offering sacrifice at the Saturnalia, invites the gods and the past emperors of Rome to a banquet, at which the founder of Rome (referred to by his deified name of Quirinus) requests through the agency of Hermes that the emperors be invited to compete with each other in demonstrating which of them should be ranked highest in terms of achievements and character. Further details of this heavily ironic and rather tedious work are not necessary for an understanding of what must concern us here, namely the attack on the first Christian emperor, on Christianity itself and on its founder, all of which throw an interesting light on the direction in which Julian's policy and propaganda were now moving. When it comes at last to Constantine's turn to make out a case for the superiority of his achievements, Julian exploits to the full the unlimited scope for invention and manipulation afforded him by the fantastic and whimsical nature of his subject and its dramatic setting. Thus, he reads Constantine's mind and puts into his mouth words which are artfully designed to incriminate him and arguments destined to be rebutted or flatly contradicted by Silenus (the satyr-like creature of classical mythology and former instructor of the god Dionysus) acting in this work in his new role as celestial court jester and licensed buffoon. The following translation of this first attack on Constantine should convey something of the artfulness of the emperor's contrivance and the intensity of his malice:

After him [i.e. Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher emperor and destined winner of the competition] they allowed Constantine to speak. At first he felt confident about the contest, though when he began to con-

sider the others' achievements, he saw that his own were altogether insignificant. For he had destroyed two usurpers, one of them soft and unwarlike, the other a worn-out old man, and both of them utterly hateful to both gods and men. His exploits against the barbarians made him ridiculous (in fact, he had paid them a sort of tribute) and he kept his gaze fixed on Luxury. But she stood far from the gods close to the portals of the Moon. He was infatuated with her and, being wholly absorbed in looking at her, cared nothing for the debate. But when he too had to say something, he said: "I am better than them in this respect, namely; I am better than the Macedonian [i.e. Alexander the Great, included in the contest on the insistence of Heracles] in that I fought against Romans and Germans and Scythians and the barbarians of Asia, better than Caesar and Octavian in that I did not, like them, engage in civil strife against respectable citizens but punished the most wicked and abominable of usurpers. I might fairly be preferred to Trajan on account of my exploits against usurpers and I might not unreasonably be considered his equal in virtue of having recovered the territory which he conquered, unless re-conquest is an even greater feat than conquest. And Marcus here by not speaking about himself does us all the service of giving up his claim to the first prize." To which Silenus rejoined: "Constantine, is it really the gardens of Adonis that you are presenting to us as your achievements?" "What," exclaimed the latter, "are these gardens of Adonis to which you refer?" "The ones," he said, "which women plant in honour of Aphrodite's lover, after filling up earthenware pots with soil. They spring up fresh and green for a short while and then at once they wither away." And Constantine blushed, instantly realizing that his own achievement was of just such a kind.⁵³

This first attack on Constantine is factually inaccurate in content and evasive and underhand in presentation. As far as the "two usurpers" are concerned, it should perhaps be pointed out that in the chaotic conditions following the breakdown of Diocletian's Tetrarchy it makes little sense to speak of usurpation and Licinius was certainly no more of a usurper than Constantine. But Julian, who from the outset had been quick to grasp the usefulness of the dynastic principle of hereditary succession to which he owed the ease with which he had assumed the reins of government, had already subscribed enthusiastically to the foundation myth of the upstart dynasty of Constantine about four years earlier in his second panegyric of Constantius. Moreover, he had become, by the time he wrote the *Caesars* a no less enthusiastic proponent of the twin notions of dynastic succession and absolute monarchy.⁵⁴

The attempt to belittle Constantine's victories by reading the mind of an imaginary Constantine in an invented situation reveals both the waywardness and the weakness of Julian's intellectual position. Constantine's forces were heavily outnumbered at the battle of the Milvian Bridge (perhaps by as many as four to one) and Licinius was an experienced general and an able tactician. Both these events, of course, must have become by Julian's day familiar milestones in Constantine's ever-closer relations with the Christians and therefore constituted an obvious but also an extremely elusive target.

The third and final attack, which is a personal attack on Constantine and his sons and indeed on Christianity itself, occurs close to the conclusion of the *Caesars*. It relies heavily on associating Constantine's conversion to Christianity with allegations touching the darker side of his private life and on Julian's use of his unrestricted powers of narrative invention. The second and only slightly earlier attack had taken the form of a critique of Constantine's administration, which a make-belief Constantine, on being questioned concerning the nature of his ideals, obligingly offers, accusing himself in the process of having amassed a fortune in order to indulge in lavish expenditure in pursuit of his own desires and as a means of ingratiating himself with his friends.⁵⁵

After Marcus Aurelius has been proclaimed the winner, the other contestants are invited to go and live henceforth under the patronage of a god of their choosing, which they all do with the exception of Constantine:

But Constantine, not finding a model for his way of life among the gods, caught sight of Luxury at no great distance from him and ran towards her. She received him tenderly, threw her arms around him, decked him out in embroidered robes, and escorted him to Profligacy, where he found Jesus going about proclaiming to all: "whoever is a seducer, a murderer, whoever is under a curse, whoever is a blackguard let him boldly make his way. With this water I shall straightaway make him pure and if he re-offends, once he has beaten his breast and struck his head, I shall vouchsafe that he be made pure again."⁵⁶ Overjoyed, he [i.e. Constantine] withdrew with his sons from the assembly of the gods and turned to him [i.e. Jesus]. But the avenging deities of godlessness afflicted him and them with equal fury, exacting punishment for the blood of their relatives until Zeus granted them a respite on account of Claudius [i.e. Claudius Gothicus, the fancied founder

of the dynasty of Constantine] and Constantius [i.e. Constantius Chlorus, father of Constantine and grandfather of Constantius and also of Julian].⁵⁷

This peevish display of authorial omnipotence is, above all, an angry display of imperial power and a chilling reminder of the ease with which religious propaganda can degenerate into religious warfare. With regard to the overall purpose and ideological import of this disconcertingly miscellaneous composition and bearing in mind that it must also have been intended for those who might still to some extent be thought to share his religious beliefs, the following characterization can hardly be bettered.

The *Caesars* brings together many points from Julian's other writings. Its purpose is propaganda. Julian wanted to reassure his audience that a single emperor could combine the virtues of his predecessors in both military and civilian matters. He had won victories in the West; he would win more in the East. And this would be with the aid of the old gods.⁵⁸

About two weeks later, on the 1st of January A.D. 363 to be precise, Julian's personal friend and enthusiastic supporter, Libanius, delivered an oration before the emperor at Antioch. Its occasion was Julian's fourth consulship, for which it had been expressly commissioned. This work affords many instructive glimpses into the nature of Julian's ongoing propaganda campaign.⁵⁹ Julian's "conversion" is jubilantly described in terms of an exclusive form of polytheism as the recognition through the study of philosophy of "the real gods rather than the imaginary one." Libanius then goes on to call the day of Julian's conversion "the beginning of freedom for the world."⁶⁰ But what the slogan "freedom" (ἐλευθερία), used here by Libanius, would come to mean under the rule of an absolute monarch with a revolutionary programme of religious restoration and reform, soon amounted to little more than the imposing of restraint on one side and the granting of licence to the other in an increasingly bitter dispute over the nature of religious worship and belief. This state of affairs is further illustrated by Julian's later ironic use of the word.⁶¹

The attack on Constantius that follows is desultory and discontinuous. But, as it gradually takes shape it builds up into a relatively explicit and much more detailed account of matters darkly hinted at or scarcely touched upon by Julian in

the *Caesars*.⁶² The most interesting feature of all, however, from the perspective of the present discussion is the re-emergence, in the context of Julian's past military achievements and Libanius' professed belief that the mere presence of the emperor had been sufficient to deter any immediate threat to the empire's eastern frontier, of the notion of the *pax deorum*. It is so important as to merit direct quotation, which may be rendered as follows:

What then has brought about the sudden change in military morale? What has elevated the good fortune of the Romans to the level of inspiring fear among the Persians? No kind of infantry warfare or cavalry action, no innovation in weapons or invention of engines of war, but the frequent sacrifices, the copious blood-offerings, the clouds of incense, the feasting of gods and guardian spirits, these are what has brought our enemies down. And so he delights in being called priest as much as in being called emperor and lives up to the name by his actions.⁶³

Roughly six weeks later,⁶⁴ this same emperor composed his last work usually referred to as *Misopogon* [i.e. *Beard-hater*]. It is cast in the form of a heavily ironic apology on the part of Julian to the citizens of Antioch for not being the kind of emperor they would have liked him to be and is by turns sarcastic, reproachful and menacing. Somewhat naively and no doubt sincerely, Julian had professed to encourage freedom of expression from the inhabitants of a city the reality of which differed immeasurably from his fanciful expectations of what it would be like. Then, as relations between citizens and emperor came increasingly under strain, Julian's unkempt appearance and lack of refinement made him an object of public ridicule. But this strange narrative is more than just the egocentric musings of a disgruntled autocrat: it is a depressing chronicle of half truths, evasions,⁶⁵ and endless misunderstandings. Julian at Antioch with his demand for instant change, his easy assumption that all right-minded individuals must think as he does, his inability to envisage the unintended consequences of his actions and his large army billeted on the city was from the outset in danger of unwittingly bringing about a situation analogous to that of a foreign occupation.⁶⁶ Worse still, he continually lectured the civil population of Antioch and its leaders, reprimanding them for their failure to honour the ancient gods, for the mass conversion of the

majority of their citizens to Christianity, and for what he considers to be their amoral, frivolous and pleasure-seeking life-style.⁶⁷ They in turn responded with mocking and disrespectful street-chants. In the end (5th of March 363), he shook the dust off his feet as he left the unconverted city, vowing never to return to it.⁶⁸ In these unhappy circumstances, the self-obsessed ruler of the Roman World set off for his projected invasion of Persia. It is difficult to gauge Julian's state of mind at the time. Was the cruel jibe: "how, oh valiant prince, will you endure the arrows of the Persians, when you tremble at our jests?"⁶⁹ still ringing in his ears?

The Attempt at Persuasion and the Impending Disaster

Whether through superficial coincidence or the writer's deliberate contrivance, it is hard for the reader familiar with Plutarch's account of Crassus' ill-starred invasion of Parthia to escape the impression of *déjà vu* on turning to those pages of Ammianus' history which deal with Julian's Persian Campaign. But, whereas in Plutarch's account it is not hard to detect the use of divination and related activities by Crassus' political enemies in order to obstruct the progress of his plans to invade Parthia,⁷⁰ the recourse to religious objections in the hope of persuading Julian to desist from or at least postpone his grandiose schemes of conquest appears to have been the work of some of the wisest of his coreligionists and friends. Ammianus frequently records instances of unfavourable omens and their interpretation in his narrative of Julian's Persian campaign and of events leading up to it. The historian attaches considerable importance to some of these, starting with the mention of the occurrence of an earthquake in Constantinople, the news of which reached Julian at the beginning of his preparations for the campaign. The experts in these matters, we are told, "pronounced it to be an unfavourable omen for a ruler planning to invade someone else's territory and tried to persuade him to desist from the untimely enterprise." Moreover, Julian was informed by letter at about the same time that the Sibylline Books had been consulted at Rome, as he had instructed, and had given an unambiguous response enjoining upon him not to leave his frontiers that year.⁷¹

Then, perhaps even more significantly, while his army was safely assembled at Cercusium, its last halting place before setting foot on hostile territory, Julian received a letter from his old and trusted friend Sallustius in Gaul begging him to postpone his invasion of Persia "lest prematurely and without having yet obtained by entreaty the *pax deorum* he should meet with irreversible destruction."⁷² But this last careful effort at persuasion went equally unheeded and Julian pressed on regardless.⁷³ Julian's official attitude towards the question of how best to interpret and, if need be, placate the will of heaven seems in fact to have undergone a subtle transformation in the early stages of his invasion of Persia following the mood of mounting frustration, anger, and impatience which characterized the last part of his stay in Antioch. A few examples should suffice to make this point clear. On the 6th of April 363, Julian was met by a troop of soldiers who brought him the body of an enormous lion which had attacked the men but had been dispatched by a rain of missiles. Julian, emboldened by this happening, which he interpreted as an omen of future success, pushed ahead with even greater confidence. But the *haruspices*, who, Ammianus tells us, had frequently tried to prevent the campaign only to meet with disbelief, consulted their manuals on divination in time of war and demonstrated that the sign constituted a prohibition for a ruler to invade another's territory even in a just cause. This interpretation was greeted with derision by the philosophers in attendance on Julian⁷⁴ and much later on in his narrative Ammianus describes a very similar reaction on the part of the emperor himself to the expert advice of the *haruspices*.⁷⁵ But Julian's last desperate show of contempt in the face of the findings of the professional practitioners of divination was not the first manifestation of a change of attitude and a growing loss of self-control. Earlier in that same fateful month of June, after a Roman victory outside Ctesiphon, he offered a sacrifice of ten particularly fine bulls to Mars the Avenger in anticipation of further victories. But nine of the animals sank dejectedly to the ground before they were brought to the altar and the tenth broke loose. When it was eventually brought back and sacrificed, the omens it gave were unfavourable. Julian reacted angrily, calling on Jupiter to witness that he would never sacrifice to Mars again.⁷⁶ Finally, Ammianus, whilst carefully

chronicling the steps of increasing rashness, desperation, and folly by which Julian contrived to imperil his army and eventually to forfeit his own life, is equally at pains to emphasize the extent to which the emperor persisted in disregarding the explicit warnings of both men and gods. Thus, by a tragic irony which accords with the historian's dramatic presentation of events, the reader is left to draw the awkward but inescapable conclusion that the essential validity of the notion of the *pax deorum* has been confirmed by the failure of the very man who had set out to restore the cult of the ancient gods and to ensure their continued worship by the power of his authority and the success of his actions. The impossibility of reconciling Julian's actions with his intentions must subsequently have done much to undermine the intellectual position as well as the material influence of those who still supported the cause he had espoused. Moreover, that such was indeed the case is suggested by the remark preserved in the tradition represented by Eunapius/Zosimus to the effect that: "he [i.e. Julian] left Antioch when the sacrificial victims had not even turned out to be auspicious for him. But although I know the explanation [of how that came about] I shall pass over it."⁷⁷ This awkward reality perhaps goes some way to explain why the attempt in Eunapius/Zosimus to ascribe all subsequent disasters suffered by the Roman Empire under the rule of Christian emperors to the failure to appease the ancient gods was to have so little resonance in the Eastern half of the empire.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The normal categories of historical interpretation break down when applied to the sequence of actions and events described in Ammianus' narrative. Julian was in fact a visionary, the clarity of whose vision bore no relation to the confused reality that surrounded him, and his policy and actions appear to have been conditioned by the painful experiences of his early life.⁷⁹ The single-minded goal of reversing the legacy of Constantine and his sons was to generate not clarity but confusion. His failure to implement one part of his programme at Antioch, where he displayed a remarkable propensity for driving himself into an impossible corner, was replicated by his conduct of military operations in Persia. It is pointless,

therefore, to attempt to analyse the objectives of that campaign; all that can safely be said is that from the start they must have been grandiose and imprecise. As the campaign progressed they became more so. As for his motivation, that was indissolubly bound up with his grand design of restoring and justifying the official worship of the ancient gods and further complicated by the reluctant awareness of the scale of the obstacles to its implementation which had been forced upon him during his stay in Antioch. Yet, there are rational explanations for some of the weaknesses on the Roman side, which probably precluded the possibility of realizing any scheme of conquest or territorial aggrandizement. And these are worth pointing out.

In the first place, the Romans were at a considerable disadvantage in terms of military intelligence, a situation further exacerbated by Julian's heedless and complacent behaviour. He had a strategic plan, as Ammianus makes clear, but it was against a textbook enemy, not a real one.⁸⁰ A certain Antoninus, after first having gained accurate knowledge of the disposition and numbers of troops, the organization of the commissariat, and the strategic planning of the Roman East, defected to the Persians in 359. The Romans, on the other hand, were still relying at the time of Julian's invasion on information supplied by Hormisdas (apparently a member of the Persian royal family), who had defected to the Romans in 324!⁸¹ Worse still, it does not appear to have occurred to Julian that in the course of nearly forty years the Persians might have taken any serious steps to strengthen the defences of Ctesiphon. After all, his much maligned predecessor had at least shown some awareness of his enemy's capacity to take effective counter measures. Shortly after the Persian envoy had been sent back in 358 with Constantius' reply rejecting Shapur's claims to Mesopotamia and Armenia, three envoys followed "bearing gifts and a letter from the emperor with the idea of somehow contriving to halt Sapor's preparations, so that the northern provinces might not be fortified beyond all possibility of attack."⁸² But Julian's cavalier attitude to military intelligence is even more strikingly illustrated by Libanius in his celebratory speech of the 1st of January 363, where the orator informs his audience that, because of his extreme piety and close relations with the gods, the emperor has no need to appoint panels of military advisers and can by-

pass such time-wasting procedures since he has recourse to higher channels of communication. "Therefore," Libanius continues, "though there are no or very few dispatches from the frontiers of the empire, he is acquainted with everything. And just as nothing on earth escapes the notice of the sun [at this point the orator turns to address the emperor directly] so, by gift of the sun god himself, nothing that happens escapes your notice either."⁸³ This is almost too great a flight of fancy even for a writer of panegyric, always assuming, that is, that its destined recipient was still in his right mind.

The turning point, however, after which the fate of the expedition was sealed, was probably the realization that the defences of Ctesiphon were so strong that the city could not be taken by storm before the arrival of Shapur with the bulk of the Persian army. After that things went from bad to worse and a rapidly deteriorating situation was further aggravated by Julian's often rash and foolhardy decisions.⁸⁴ Moreover, the random and mindless savagery directed at times by Julian and his army against the unarmed and defenceless civilian population must have helped to stiffen Persian resistance.⁸⁵ Finally, when Julian rushed into battle for the last time, apparently forgetting to put on his coat of mail,⁸⁶ was mere impetuosity the cause or an unconscious death wish? Certainly his death as a result of a wound received in battle left him with his honour intact and spared him the need to choose between the painful alternatives of retreating with his army after negotiating from a position of weakness with the Persians or risking at some later stage the annihilation of his forces and his own defeat and/or death. By the manner of his death and by the way in which it has been recorded for posterity Julian's memory soon entered into the realm of two opposing legends,⁸⁷ which between them offer a serious challenge and a permanent distraction to anyone attempting to set the historical record straight. On the other hand, his successor Jovian, who was left with the invidious task of salvaging what could still be salvaged in return for territorial concessions, has not fared so well in the eyes of posterity. Yet it is by no means inconceivable that Jovian's actions saved as many lives as Julian's had squandered. Accordingly, it should come as no surprise when the devout Christian Agathias, who composed his *Histories* in the late sixth century, writes:

In the twenty fourth year of his [i.e. Shapur's] reign the city of Nisibis fell into Persian hands. It had long been subject to the Romans and it was their own Emperor, Jovian, who surrendered and abandoned it. The previous Emperor, Julian, had penetrated into the heart of the Persian Empire when he died suddenly and Jovian was proclaimed Emperor by the generals and the troops. Hampered by the recentness of his accession and by the prevailing confusion engendered no doubt by the state of emergency that had brought him to power and finding himself, moreover, in the middle of enemy territory, he was in no position to effect a leisureed and orderly settlement of affairs. In his anxiety, therefore, to terminate his sojourn in a foreign and a hostile land and to return with all speed to his own country he became party to an ignoble treaty, which to this very day is a blot on the Roman state. By it he confined thereafter the extent of his Empire within new frontiers, whittling away its far-flung corners.⁸⁸

Such was the longevity and persistence of the costly rhetoric of empire, even when the reality was but a shadow of its former self.⁸⁹

Notes

1. For which see *Ammianus* 20.4.1–22. But Ammianus may have been economical with the truth and there is a distinct possibility that what happened at Paris had been stage-managed by Julian and the inner circle of his friends, an interpretation which has been argued for cogently on the basis of a critical examination of all the relevant sources by G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (London, 1978), pp. 46–54.

2. According to *Ammianus* 20.5.10, Julian had confided to his close friends the night before he was proclaimed *Augustus* that the *Genius Publicus*, the guardian spirit of the Roman state, had appeared to him urging him to accept the increase in rank it was striving to secure for him.

3. A law of Constantius, dated December 1st 356, had ordered the closure of pagan temples and the cessation of sacrificial worship (*C. Th.* 16.10.4), under pain of death and confiscation of property for those who failed to comply.

4. The earlier form *pax deum* is attested in a number of formulaic expressions, for which see G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (repr. 2nd ed. of 1912; Munich, 1971), p. 390, n. 3.

5. For this last, morally reprehensible, instance cf. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, pp. 387–88.

6. Only three of these priestly colleges need detain us here. Their membership, which contained no professional priests but was confined to distinguished public

figures, was distributed between each body as follows: sixteen *pontifices*, sixteen augurs, and the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis* (i.e. fifteen men designated to conduct sacrifices). In terms of their respective functions, the *pontifices* were responsible for the general oversight of the public performance of religion at Rome and come first in order of importance and influence. On the other hand, their activities in the sphere of divination ensured the vital importance of the augurs, since before any major decision of state, such as the holding of an assembly, the declaration of war, or the passing of a law, the will of heaven had to be consulted. As for the *quindecimviri*, they played a vital role in times of particularly acute crisis owing to the fact that they alone had the right to consult the Sibylline Books. An exhaustive and authoritative discussion of all these matters is to be found in Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, pp. 501–49. Here we are concerned with the bare minimum necessary for the understanding of a religious phenomenon so widespread and so enduring as to constitute a historical constant over much of the lifespan of the Roman Empire right up to the fourth century A.D. and beyond.

7. There is a useful short discussion of some of the many such historically attested examples of the manipulation of religious belief for political ends in J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 13–17.

8. R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods* (London, 1974), p. 65.

9. Eusebius *Vita Constantini* 1.28–29. Heikel's edition of 1902 (GCS 7) was replaced by F. Winkelmann's edition, which appeared in 1975 under the title *Über das Leben des Kaiser Konstantin* where the passage in question runs from p. 29, line 23, to p. 30, line 15 of the 1991 second revised edition. In support of the essential veracity of this version, see the interesting discussion of Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion*, pp. 278–79. But what matters here is the widespread currency of such ideas in what was an almost universally credulous age.

10. It should perhaps be noted that Constantine's resort to a new and hitherto untried deity was not without precedent. At a critical juncture in the war against Hannibal, in 205 B.C., the cult of Cybele was introduced by the senate after consultation of the Sibylline Books. For which, Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, pp. 317–18.

11. Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 10.7.2 (Loeb ed. vol. 2, pp. 464–65). All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

12. See *Panegyriques latins*, vol. 2, *Les Panegyriques constantiniens*, texte établi et traduit par Edouard Galletier (Paris, 1952), p. 106. The panegyric in question (*Panegyricus Constantino dictus*) is assigned the Roman number IX in Galletier's edition.

13. See *ibid.*, p. 105.

14. For the activities of these experts in the ancient Etruscan art of divining the future through studying the markings on the entrails of sacrificial beasts and the observation and interpretation of various natural and unnatural phenomena, see Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, pp. 543–49.

15. *Panegyricus Constantino dictus*, ed. Galletier II.4–5 (= p. 124).

16. *Ibid.*, IV.2 (= p. 126) “dic, quaeso, quid in consilio nisi divinum numen habuisti?”

17. *Ibid.*, IV.2. “An illa te ratio ducebat (sua enim cuique prudentia deus est) quod in tam dispari contentione non poterat melior causa non superare et, innumerabiles licet ille copias pro se obiceret, pro te tamen iustitia pugnabat?”

18. *Ibid.*, IV. 5, “In tam diversa causarum ratione divino consilio, imperator, hoc est tuo, non militum multitudinem, sed partium merita numerasti.”

19. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion*, pp. 287–88, seems to be reading too much into the context of a speech which relies so heavily on the rhetorical juxtaposition of the contrasting motifs of panegyric and invective when he writes: “The speech also contains a polemic against divination. The orator recalls that Constantine had undertaken the campaign against the advice of the *haruspices* while his opponent was given to the use of all forms of divination. The outcome of the war had clearly discredited the pagan science.” But it is in the context of Maxentius' alleged cowardice that he is represented as shutting himself up inside his palace in Rome rather than marching out to confront Constantine that the orator adds the injurious explanatory comment “Ita enim aut prodigiis aut metus sui praesagiis monebatur” (“to such an extent, in fact, was he warned either by ominous occurrences or by the forebodings of his own fear”). This comment exactly parallels in terms of invective the earlier encomiastic explanation offered for Constantine's apparent defiance of the “warnings of the *haruspices*.” In both cases there is the same substitution of internal for external motivation. As for “the outcome of the war discrediting the pagan science,” the year 313 is much too soon for so startling a reversal of such deep-rooted, age-old irrational beliefs to have taken place.

20. A detailed critical account of these events can be found in T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), pp. 66–77.

21. See A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike, Römische Geschichte von Diocletian bis Justinian 284–565 n. Chr.* (Munich, 1989), p. 81 and n. 7, where the matter is dealt with clearly, succinctly, and with appropriate reference to the relevant sources. Demandt's qualified condemnation is not dissimilar to that expressed by Eutropius (born not long after A.D. 320) in his *Breviarium* 10.9 (ed. Rühl, Leipzig, 1887) with regard to the fate of Flavius Dalmatius, Constantine's nephew and fourth in succession according to the terms of the emperor's will who

"was destroyed shortly afterwards in a military insurrection, which his cousin Constantius permitted rather than ordered" ("oppressus est factione militari Constantio, patrueli suo, sinente potius quam iubente").

22. Towards the end of 241, pagan sacrifices were forbidden (cf. *C. Th.* 16.10.2) and by an enactment dated 1st November 342 (cf. *C. Th.* 16.10.3) pagan worship was abolished, but temples outside the walls of cities were left untouched in view of their being the traditional starting point for the inauguration of games, chariot races, or athletic contests.

23. According to *Philostorgius* 3.26, ed. J. Bidez and F. Winkelmann (Berlin, 1981 = GCS 60 = p. 52, lines 5–9 of the Greek text), and by implication *Eutropius* 10.10.2 (ed. Rühl) "virum probum et morum veterum" ("a man of honourable character and old-fashioned ways"), the latter phrase being a coded way of describing attachment, at least in spirit, to the traditional worship of the ancient gods.

24. According to Eutropius, *Breviarium* 10.12.1–2, ed. F. Rühl (repr. of 1887 edition, Stuttgart, 1985), the Roman Empire was seriously weakened henceforth both in its ability to wage war abroad and in its capacity for self-defence.

25. See *C. Th.* 16.10.5 (dated November 353): nocturnal sacrifices prohibited.

26. *C. Th.* 9.16.4.

27. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion*, p. 24.

28. For the date, see *L'empereur Julien, œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pt. 1, *Discours de Julien César*, text établi et traduit par J. Bidez (Paris, 1972), p. 3.

29. The present discussion owes much to Arnaldo Marcone, "il significato della spedizione di Giuliano contro la Persia," *Athenaeum*, n.s. 57 (1979), pp. 334–56, but I cannot agree entirely with his characterization on page 338 of Julian's remarks as "a brief but lucid analysis of Persia's relations with the Graeco-Roman world and, in particular, with the Roman state" ("una breve ma lucida analisi dei rapporti della Persia col mondo Greco-latino e, in particolare, con lo Stato romano").

30. The reference is to the actions of Galerius in 297, for which see Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, p. 17.

31. Julian, ed. and trans. J. Bidez, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 29–31.

32. This sentence, which fills eleven out of a total of twenty-six lines in J. Bidez's Greek text, consists of four finite verbs, five past participles, and one present participle and is structured so as to form two subordinate clauses followed by two main clauses.

33. Julian, ed. Bidez, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 133, lines 29–37.

34. See *Dio* 80 3–4 and *Herodian* 6.2.1–2.

35. See Julian, ed. Bidez, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 132–47, a rapid perusal of which is sufficient to reveal the extent and the thoroughness of this process of verbal substitution.

36. Incidentally, it is worth pointing out, in the present context, that the notion of *Interpretatio Graeca* is useful only in as much as it serves as a reminder of the fact that Greek and Latin accounts of what might loosely be described as Sasanian irredentist claims are often overlaid with details culled from the classical Greek historiographical tradition. But to invoke such a notion in order to deny the existence of these claims would be utterly misguided, since proof positive of their reality is provided by the explicit but unwitting testimony of Julian's fanciful outburst.

37. For which, see J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), pp. 24–27.

38. *Ammianus* 17.5.1–8.

39. Reading Haupt's conjecture "infringendum" rather than the absurd and meaningless conjecture "infindendum" accepted and incorporated by J. C. Rolfe in his text.

40. *Ammianus* 17.5.10–14.

41. The phrase "recalling that what I am about to say I have often repeated" ("reminiscens, haec quae dicturus sum me saepius replicasse") is particularly important, because it means that Julian may well have heard of Shapur's territorial claims even before Constantius' receipt of Shapur's ultimatum. Moreover, Bidez's argument (Julian, ed. Bidez, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 109) in favour of Shapur's letter as a *terminus ante quem* for Julian's second panegyric of Constantius is based on the assumption that Julian's statement that after his unsuccessful siege of Nisibis in 350 the Persian emperor remained at peace is incompatible with the menacing tone adopted by him in that same letter. But Shapur did not in fact take any action before the spring of 359.

42. Marcone (*Athenaeum*, n.s. 57, pp. 335–39) is, I think, right in seeing behind the utterances of the panegyrist of Constantius a foreshadowing of the aggressive anti-Persian propaganda of the future emperor and his associates, which would be aimed at replacing and above all discrediting the prudent frontier policy adopted by Constantius.

43. See *Ammianus* 23.6.6.

44. *Ammianus* 21.10.7–8.

45. The work, which is known as *Misopogon* or "Beard-hater," is cast in the form of a heavily ironic apology on the part of Julian to the citizens of Antioch for not being the kind of emperor they would have preferred him to be. Yet, this proposition might just as easily have been stood on its head! And if at times the author expresses a genuine sense of anguish and disillusionment that can hardly fail to elicit the sympathy of the reader, he all too often writes in a manner which is both venomously sarcastic and filled with suppressed fury.

46. Unfortunately, the text as it stands at this point is nonsense and so, inevitably, are those translations which are based upon it. W. C. Wright's translation

of 1913 reads: "In the tenth month according to your reckoning" and that of Christian Lacombrade (Paris, 1964): "Le dixième mois de l'année, si l'on s'en remet à votre compte." To state the problem in its simplest terms, October was the tenth month of the official civil calendar of the Roman Empire (the Roman Julian calendar) and the *first* month of the local calendar of Antioch. A useful short discussion of these facts is to be found in E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* (London, 1968), pp. 25, 50–51, and 70–71. The text can be emended, however, by recognizing the occurrence at this point of one of the commonest and most ubiquitous of scribal confusions resulting from the phenomenon known as *iotacism*. As a consequence of this phenomenon, the pronunciation of the two words ὑμῖν and ἡμῖν, being respectively the dative of the second and the first plural personal pronouns ("to you" and "to us"), had, by the time most of our extant manuscripts were copied, become identical. Hence, I have offered a different translation on the basis of a proposed re-reading of Lacombrade's text at this point. The discussion of such *minutiae* has little relevance to the main reason for my choice of the present extract, but the unacceptable alternative would have been to help perpetuate an error which should by now have been eliminated.

47. *L'empereur Julien, œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pt. 2, ed. and trans. C. Lacombrade, chap. 34/pp. 187–88/361d–362b. Since the Greek text of this volume is not equipped with line numbers, the chapter and page numbers of Lacombrade's edition are given, followed by the relevant page numbers of Spanheim's edition (as reproduced by Lacombrade on the right-hand margin of his text). This slightly cumbersome procedure should at least ensure greater accuracy of reference than would otherwise be the case.

48. See *ibid.*, chap. 35/p. 188–189/362c–363c.

49. *Ibid.*, chap. 35/p. 189/363a–b.

50. See *Acts* 11. 26 (probably to be dated to the seventies A.D.), "It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians.'"

51. See *Ammianus* 22.12.8.

52. See *Ammianus* 22.13, 2–3. See also *L'empereur Julien*, ed. Lacombrade, vol. 2, pt. 2, chap. 33/p. 187/361c. A remarkably balanced and informative modern account of this sorry train of events is to be found in R. Browning, *The Emperor Julian* (London, 1975), pp. 180–86.

53. See *L'empereur Julien*, ed. Lacombrade, vol. 2, pt. 2, chap. 30/pp. 61–62.

54. These points have all been touched upon with great skill and sensitivity by Polymnia Athanassiadi in *Julian, an Intellectual Biography* (London, 1992), pp. 64, 89, and 94.

55. *L'empereur Julien*, ed. Lacombrade, vol. 2, pt. 2, chap. 36/p. 69/335b.

56. The words Julian puts in the mouth of Jesus here are a scurrilous parody, which combines elements

drawn from Mark 16:16, Luke 18:13, Acts: 2, 38, 22, 16 and perhaps I Corinthians 6:9–11.

57. *Caesars*, ed. Lacombrade, chap. 38/pp. 70–71/336a–b.

58. B. Baldwin, "The *Caesars* of Julian," *Klio* 60 (1978), pp. 449–66, p. 446.

59. Greek text with facing English translation in *Libanius Selected Works*, vol. 1, *The Julianic Oration* (Loeb Classical Library), trans. A. F. Norman. The speech appears as Oration 12, pp. 36–97.

60. Oration 12, 33–34/p. 54.

61. In the *Misopogon*. This ironic use of the word was pointed out, discussed, and thoroughly analysed by Athanassiadi in *Julian, an Intellectual Biography*, pp. 216–18.

62. Thus, Constantius is accused of the murder of Julian's half-brother, the *Caesar* Gallus, and of refraining from doing the same to Julian only through his inability to find a plausible excuse for extending the scope of his accusations (Libanius, *Oration* 12.35/p. 54–55). Libanius sketches an exaggeratedly sombre picture of a desperate military situation in both East and West with the frontiers an easy prey to marauding barbarians in order to explain Constantius' sudden elevation of Julian to the rank of *Caesar* with the unenviable task of serving in place of an emperor in order to retrieve the situation in Gaul (40–41/pp. 58–60). Then, after much praise of Julian's military achievements, Julian is represented as driven through the envious machinations of Constantius into participation in a divinely inspired military coup resulting in his proclamation as *Augustus* by the army of Gaul, a novel version of events which saves the honour of both the emperor and his mutinous troops (57–59/pp. 70–72)! Later on, Libanius describes a situation of panic and terror in the eastern frontier provinces caused by Constantius' removal of his elite forces in order to confront Julian. But Julian, now safely in power, serves by his mere presence in the capital as an immediate deterrent to the Persians, who put out feelers for the authorization of a diplomatic mission to discuss the possibility of a negotiated settlement (71–76/pp. 78–82). A more balanced assessment of Constantius' prudent use of limited resources to defend the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire is to be found in Gerhard Wirth's article, "Julians Perserkrieg: Kriterien einer Katastrophe," in *Julian Apostata* (= vol. 509 of the series *Wege der Forschung* (Darmstadt, 1978), pp. 455–507 and esp. pp. 458–60, where he sees in Constantius' defensive measures a calculated resort to a limited war of attrition likely to resolve itself eventually in Rome's favour. He also draws attention to Constantius' success in having built up by 361 a system of defence capable of reducing Shapur to a stalemate and leaving him with no alternative but to seek a mutually acceptable settlement through diplomatic means.

63. Libanius, *Oration* 12.79–80/pp. 82–84.

64. For the date, see Lacombrade's introductory note on pp. 141–42.

65. After the inhabitants of Emesa had gone on the rampage, destroying churches and restoring the sanctuaries of the gods with Julian's encouragement, he somewhat disingenuously expressed regret that in their eagerness to punish those who showed no respect for the gods they had gone further than he would have wished (*Misopogon*, chap. 33/pp. 186–87/361a).

66. For the drunken excesses of Julian's army, especially the Celts (later held up by him to the Antiochenes as an example on account of the simplicity of their lifestyle and the purity of their morals!), see *Ammianus* 22.12.6.

67. Exemplified as follows: 1) failure to honour the gods: *Misopogon*, chap. 11/pp.165–67/344b–345b; chap. 34/pp. 187–88/361d–362b. 2) conversion of the majority to Christianity: chap. 35/p. 189/363–363c; deplorable life-style: chap. 3/pp.158–59/339–339b; chap. 8/pp. 162–63/342–342d; chap. 20/pp. 173–74/350–51b.

68. But before his departure, he appointed governor of Syria a certain Alexander of Heliopolis, whom he knew to be cruel, vicious, and generally unfit for the post. According to *Ammianus* 23.2.3, he did this as a deliberate act of revenge against the people of Antioch, an assertion corroborated by Libanius, *Oration* 15.73, which was written very close to the event (discussion of date in A. F. Norman's edition and translation, pp. 196–97, note a).

69. Chap. 10/p.165/344b.

70. I have discussed this and related aspects of Plutarch's *Life of Crassus* in *BAI* 17 (2003 [2007]), pp. 71–81, esp. pp. 75–76.

71. *Ammianus* 23.1.7.

72. *Ammianus* 23.5, 4–5. Note the expression “non-dum pace numinum exorata,” where “numinum” replaces “deorum,” thus allowing Ammianus to avoid the use of a technical term in accordance with the stylistic requirements of the genre.

73. J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, p. 134, remarks: “It was of course too late to turn back, even had the emperor wished to.” Certainly such a change of plan would have been a grave embarrassment for someone who had openly refused to entertain even the idea of a diplomatic solution; and Julian had already received enough in the way of embarrassment during his stay at Antioch.

74. *Ammianus* 23.5.8–10.

75. *Ammianus* 25.2.7–8.

76. *Ammianus* 24.6.17.

77. Zosime, vol. 2, pt. 1, ed. and trans. F. Paschoud (Paris, 1979), bk. 3.12.1. The matter is briefly and usefully discussed by Paschoud on pp. 103–4, n. 31.

78. The question is discussed in great detail by W. E. Kaegi in *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 99–175.

79. These are abundantly attested by Julian himself, by Libanius, and by Ammianus and have received

critical discussion and attention in the recent works of Browning, Bowersock, and Athanassiadi already referred to.

80. Interestingly, W. E. Kaegi, “Constantine's and Julian's Strategies of Strategic Surprise against the Persians,” *Athenaeum*, n.s. 59 (1981), pp. 209–13, draws attention to a no-longer extant treatise of Constantine on Persian warfare, the existence of which is attested by John Lydus, who worked in the Praetorian Prefecture in Constantinople during the middle of the sixth century and who gives some slight indication of its contents. It is by no means impossible that the bookish Julian did in fact consult this work.

81. *Ammianus* 16.10.16 indicates briefly that he had given an account of Hormisdas' defection in an earlier (now unfortunately no longer extant) book of his History. Consequently, we are dependent for both chronology and reconstruction of the details of this defection on the garbled account preserved by Zosimus 2.27.1–4, text with facing French translation on pages 99–100 of Paschoud's edition and discussion of some of the difficulties involved on pages 218–19, n. 37.

82. *Ammianus* 17.5.15. I have followed the text of the Loeb edition here, which has incorporated Clark's addition of the final negative “ne” in order to restore sense to an otherwise unintelligible manuscript reading. The “northern provinces” are “northern” from a Persian perspective and are the only ones which bordered on the Roman Empire.

83. *Libanius*, *Oration* 12, ed. Norman, p. 86.

84. All these points emerge clearly from Ammianus' detailed and dramatic narrative of events in bk. 24.7–8.

85. See for example, *Ammianus* 24.2.3 and 24.4.25. Just how far the Persians were prepared to go and at what cost to themselves in their efforts to impede the advance of Julian's invading army is well illustrated by the following extract from Ammianus' narrative: “Next, after covering a distance of fourteen miles, we reached a place where the fields are made fertile by an abundance of water. But the Persians, having learned in advance that we intended to take that route, had removed the sluice-gates and allowed the water to flow unchecked in all directions” (*Ammianus* 24.3.10). A similar account is to be found in Zosimus, 3.19.3.

86. *Ammianus* 25.3.6.

87. There is a brief but stimulating discussion of this facet of Julian's legacy in Athanassiadi, pp. 226–32.

88. *Agathias*, ed. Keydell, CFBH 2 (Berlin, 1967), bk. 4.25.6–7/pp. 155–56.

89. E. Eikhoff, *Macht und Sendung: Byzantinische Weltpolitik* (Stuttgart, 1981), pp. 16–20, draws attention to the existence, throughout nine centuries of Byzantine history, of a tension between theoretical aspiration and political reality (or, as he puts it, “zwischen ideologischer Sendung und tatsächlicher Macht”), as one of the essential and abiding characteristics of a Byzantine civilization which developed out of Constantine's relocation of the capital of the

Empire and of the emergence, as a result of his gradual adoption of Christianity, of ever closer ties between Emperor and Church. Thus, by an irony of history, it was a feature of the very legacy which Julian sought to reverse that ensured a favourable verdict on a campaign which has rightly been described as "sheer lunacy" (by G. Wirth, "Julians Perserkrieg," p. 490). Over a century and a half before Agathias, the Christian Latin poet Prudentius (Prudentius, *Apotheosis*, 451ff.), contrasting the emperor's achievements with his impiety, had

praised Julian as: ". . . ductor fortissimus armis / Conditor et legum, celeberrimus ore manuque / Consultor patriae sed non consultor habendae / Religionis, amans ter centum milia divum. / Perfidus ille Deo quamvis non perfidus orbi" ("a leader most valiant in arms, a lawgiver, too, renowned for eloquence and for action, defender of his country's interests but no defender of the faith, for he loved a plethora of gods. He broke faith with God but not with the Empire").